

# NAMSA INAUGURATES GROUP FACILITATION CENTER

## *A New Way of Making Decisions*

Louis Evangelista

An important event took place on 27 September 1994 at 1600 hours at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA), located in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The NAMSA General Manager, H. Schmidt-Petri, Major General, presided over the official opening ceremonies for the NAMSA Group Facilitation Center.

The facility uses GROUPWARE technology, which are computer-based and computer-aided facilitation tools and techniques. The term GROUPWARE is loosely used to describe software that provide support for groups working collaboratively on projects. As a generic term, it refers to "a group of technologies that mediate interpersonal collaboration through the computer."<sup>1</sup>

Specialized computer aids designed for use by collaborative working groups were reported to produce measurable productivity gains. Software for electronic meetings, in particular, were purported to reduce the time required for managers to com-

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plete complex projects by significant amounts. The Agency learned about this kind of facility, generally known as an electronic meeting system, from the U.S. Defense Information Systems Agency.

The General Manager explained in his opening remarks that the Group Facilitation Center will enable the Agency to implement a new way of making decisions since it is a tool designed to help teams in working together to achieve results. It will be open to many NAMSA users.

As shown in the Figure, the facility will help teams go through the decision making process of a meeting in a more effective and efficient manner. The advantages of using the NAMSA Group Facilitation Center should be seen in terms of its support to decision making through—

- anonymity, which removes the barriers in meetings due to emotions, rank and personality;
- parallel processing, as all participants can work simultaneously on the same issues; and
- documentation, by instant recordkeeping and reporting of the results of meetings.

The operational core of the NAMSA Group Facilitation Center is its specific hardware and software configuration.

The Hardware consist of—

- Local Area Network: Network for 12 users' laptops, two personal computer workstations, LCD flat screen, color projector, electronic white board, scanner, server, two printers and a copier.

The Software consist of—

- GROUPSYSTEMS V: The system enabling GROUPWARE operation, composed of a suite of 14 tools,

such as Electronic Brainstorming, Outliner, Alternative Evaluator, Group Writer, Vote, etc.

- CM/1: Corporate Memory 1 allows the exploration and evaluation of difficult issues by documenting positions, arguments and decisions. It is essentially a computer-based tool that supports discussions of issues in a structured way by identifying and inter-relating issues, alternative solutions and advantages/disadvantages.
- IDEFO: Integrated DEFinition is an activity modeling technique that is used for detailed process analysis. The models so created describe processes in terms of their inputs, outputs, controls and mechanisms. This technique is used to model the decisions, actions and activities of an organization or system in order to identify non-value adding and limited value adding activities, which are to be eliminated prior to automation.
- Office Automation: These are the standard automated office applications, such as *Excel*, *Word*, *PowerPoint*, etc.

The General Manager pointed out that three key ingredients make the facility work:

- (1) First, an initiator or team leader who requests a session in the facility.
- (2) Second, facilitators to help the teams through their sessions. These individuals are specially trained to handle the GROUPWARE software and to be facilitators, helping the team leader in planning and running the team sessions.
- (3) Third, participants, normally identified as the team members.

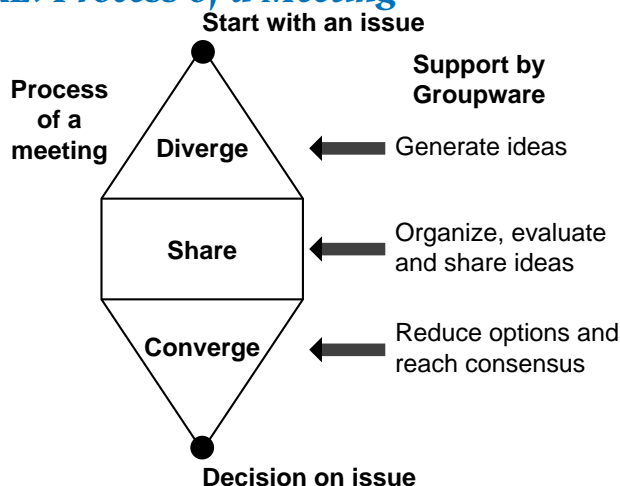
The only requirements of these individuals are that they be willing to participate, be open-minded, and be adventurous.

For further information concerning the Center, please contact the Chief, NAMS/AE, Telephone 011 (352) 30 85 85 254, Telefax 011 (352) 30 87 21, Mailing Address: NAMS/AE, UNIT 4045, APO AE 09126-4045.

## Reference

CW Custom Publications, 375 Cochituate Road, Framingham, MA 01701

**FIGURE. Process of a Meeting**



## DEFENSE INDUSTRY STUDENTS IN PMC 94-2 VISIT ADPA



During a 7 December 1994 Defense Systems Management College (DSMC) student field trip to the American Defense Preparedness Association (ADPA), Rosslyn, VA., PMC 94-2 industry student, Diane Copenhaver, receives an orientation on how industry representatives in the Washington area do their jobs and interact with Government procurement authorities. Pictured from left: Lt. Gen. Lawrence F. Skibbie, USA (RET.), President, ADPA; Diane Copenhaver, Boeing Company; George Krikorian, Industry Chair, DSMC.

Photo by Richard Mattox